

UPSTAIRS CLUB

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IN A LIFETIME what are the things that are important - what do you remember and what most affected your life.

No one, ever, begins to learn until they are through with their studies in school. I feel I was fortunate, as an artist, that my schooling finished at the end of High School. In Montana where I went to school students were not taught what to think, we were taught to think for ourselves, how to reason, and I know now, a goodly amount of ethics was taught. I am thankful that I was born in 1903 and went to school in Montana and had the opportunity to live through the six decades from then to now.

A new life began for me on July 7th in 1927 - 40 years ago - when I detrained in Chicago to seek fame and fortune in the theatre. With \$350 in my pocket I was adventurous enough not to be frightened. I had left my floral world with its very comfortable living to satisfy my stage-struck inclinations. How naive and unrealistic I was I would find out in due time. Ignorance was bliss.

Joseph Joubert, the French moralist, once said, "We do not really know anything at all until a long time after we have learned it." And in the years following I was to learn much, in many interesting corners in many different ways. Often I had fool's luck, but more bad times than good. I was blessed with good friends who helped along the way; good friends that I still have today.

I have always been guided by a sixth sense and this I'm certain lead me to Adolph Bolm's school rather than another more highly advertised one in Chicago. Bolm gave me the mental stimulus I needed starting as late as 24. It would not be easy to write all I am grateful to Bolm for, it could fill a book. Lets say he opened the flood gates to the world I so

wanted. Under his wing I had the opportunity to study under other great teachers, Alexandra Maximova, Marcel Berge, Vechslav Swoboda, Maria Montero and Jose Alvarez. In his studio I heard Ravel play for a rehearsal. I saw Stravinsky for the first time and I had the pleasure of helping Arnold Genthe (as a flunkie) as he photographed Bolm. There were many informal chats with Bolm about the early days of ballet in Russia, his association with Pavlowa. I remember how our class was stopped the day Diaghileff died and Bolm talked for an hour about the accomplishments of the man and how much ballet owed to him.

That first year at Bolm's I met and began to know Edna McRae, Edna Lucille Baum, Ruth Page, Mark Turbyfill, Paul Du Pont, Jorg Fasting, Berenice Holmes, Harriet Lundgren, Grace Cornell, Elise Reiman, Albertina Vitak. Marie Veatch and Ann Barzel. All these were students in the school.

I had my first important (to me) teaching experience in his school, the baby class. Years later, at Mr. Novikoff's grave I was to have one of these students introduce herself as a member of that baby class.

Fourteen months after my arrival at Bolm's I auditioned for the Chicago Civic Opera Ballet then under the supervision of Mr. Swoboda. I'm sure it was through his kindness that I was accepted into the company.

During those fourteen months for sustenance I worked at the State Lake Theatre as the center aisle usher where all the great vaudeville acts of the day appeared. A crew of 35 ushers handled 20 to 25 thousand people a day with lines in front of the theatre from early morning until late at night.

There was no better school for the theatre at the time than vaudeville and I was an eager student nightly. Vaudeville had the cream of Show Biz. In dance I saw Buster West, Bill Robinson, Natacha Natova, Harriet Hocter, James Barton, William Mahoney, Pat Rooney, the Cansinos, and the De Marcos. These were all great performers and I learned from each of them. Countless times I saw the popular teams of the day - Burns and Allen, Bergen and McCarthy, York and King, The Foy family and Gallagher and Shean. Actress Alla Nazimova and singer Helen Morgan I ran errands for backstage. The great comedians of those days are still some of the greats today. Among them I have special memories of Toto the clown, Buster Keaton, Trixie Friganza, Chic Sale, Fred Allen, Fannie Brice, Jack Benny, Sophie Tucker, Jimmy Savo, Ed Wynn, Cecilia Loftus and Joe Jackson Jr. To this day I respect those performers as much as any I have seen since in Dance, theater or Opera. They knew their business.

Once in opera I had a good ten years of experience in an enormous repertoire of operas (appearing in over 40 operas) working with and hearing all the great singers of that time - Mary Garden, Claudia Muzio-Rosa Raisa - Tito Schipa - Litte Lehman - Conchita Supervia - Kipmis - Thomas - Lily Pons and many others. Probably my greatest thrill was miming the visions in "Emporor Jones" with Lawrence Tibbett. And being in any opera of Garden's was exciting even if you were only supering. I had always felt that these opera years were an extension of my schooling and I was very grateful for them. Around great artists all the time and working under musicians like Bruno Walter, Emil Cooper, Egon Pollock or a Serafin had an impact on us all. Sometimes it was a great Stage director like Dr. Otto Erhardt or a Charles Moor that we received our experience in theatre. In the ballet we worked under Laurent Novikoff, Veschlav Swoboda, Muriel Stuart and towards the end it was Page and Stone. These years were well covered in Volumes 4 and 5 of the Upstairs Club Bulletin.

Aldous Huxley wrote - "Experience is not what happens to a man. It is what a man does with what happens to him." During the depression years much happened to all

of us. Work in night clubs, Fair Shows, Movie houses, and vaudeville. During the dying days of vaudeville five of us from the opera had an act called "Danse Classique". It included Harriet Lundgren, Theresa Rudolph, Sandra Devine, Bentley Stone and myself. The act was booked out of the Morris office (Mr. Morris remembering me as an Usher at the State Lake) had a stormy career and as we all now look back - it also had its funny and happy moments. During the worst part of the depression we often had rather famous vaudeville stars as our chauffeur. Our first engagement was Green Bay, Wisconsin and we drove there in an open car in the dead of winter with Paul Mall as our driver. This engagement is deeply embedded on our memories and not too pleasantly.

I learned the most dancing with a group called the "Carnival of Gypsies" which ran for over 4 years - mostly at the Bismarck Hotel. In this group I really learned - and at \$50 a week furnishing my own wardrobe. And what is more - shoes. I Choreographed my own dances and many of those for the group; designed and made my own costumes; selected my own music. Teaching supported me frugally while I was occupied learning my trade. I was also fortunate in working with Bettina Rosay my partner - a dancer with a fantastic technical facility and many of our dances were spectacularly good. Fortunate I was too in my employer - George Nelidoff who believed in me and helped me on my way. "The Gypsies" had a repertoire of 14 different shows and this kept us busy constantly working on new dances. I often think now how the dancers today deprive themselves with all their union rules which they think so much more of than they would the chance to learn something.

My concert period began during the depression doing programs for Ruth Walsh at the Art Colony. Literally it was an old stable turned into an impromptu theatre. Admission was 35 cents, and we served refreshments after the programs. About 125 people was capacity and afterwards the take was shared. None of us had enough money to buy shoes so these were barefoot days. The programs were shared with Barbara Warren, Sandra Davis, Margot Roche and Julian Francesco.

My very first ballet was "Thunder in the Hills" and was choreographed on the Federal Theatre project in Chicago. In fact it did not get a performance on the project but was first shown at Mandel Hall sponsored and paid for me by Paul Douglas (later Senator). The ballet was paired up with "That Daring Young Man". In the cast were Harold Borin (now known as Harry Bernstein head of the dance department at Adelphia College). Bettina Rosay (long time assistant dance director at Radio City Music Hall), David Nillo (long with Ballet Theatre), Pearl Lack (now Pearl Lang well known Modern dancer), John Kirza and Betsy Ross who need no introduction in Chicago. A dear friend Muriel Davenport sang the vocal accompaniment in the Stephan Foster Ballet.

Over the years I created a total of 20 Ballets on as many subjects. One does not give programs in Chicago for any public acclaim or the idea of selling them to the major companies. I had dealings with two large companies on two ballets and could not care less now about "bucking" the so called big time. As much as one wonders how many of the ballets in large companies ever are considered good enough to spend the money for costumes and sets.

My most interesting collaboration in creating has been with Lora Aborn who has composed the music for many of my solo dances and my own most favorite ballet - "In My Landscape". That ballet was a deeply personal and complex work based on the seven ages of man and using symbolism, surrealism and words from Gertrude Stein's lectures in America. Another ballet of her music which Bentley Stone and I choreographed together was - "The Lonely Ones" to the Steig drawings.

Solo Dances which had original scores by Lora Aborn were "Ditties", "Boston John", "Hot Afternoons have been in Montana", "The Strawberry Roan" and "Casey at the Bat". The later dance was choreographed by Bentley Stone for me.

Two dances, or I should say ballets, that I danced so much and for so long that the characters seem like old friends were "Dr. Eli Duffy" and "The Shooting of Dan McGrew".

When I got out of the army I read of a contest given by Theatre Guild for a ballet with words. I had always wanted to write so here was a chance to try my skill. I chose a subject and for four months I sat up late at night after work writing. I wanted the dialogue to sound and speak easily, so the neighbors could hear me shouting these lines late at night. It is a wonder I wasn't taken away. The end result was "Like a Weeping Willow" which I mailed into Theatre Guild. True to Theatre Guild's reputation in the past just before the winner was to be announced they cancelled the contest.

For sometime I did nothing with the script. Later I decided I would try to interest a composer into writing a score for it. Several turned it down but in the end Norman Curtis, a pupil of Rudolph Ganz, took it on. He did a very fine score and I began to work. Like most of our productions the ballet had a fine set by Ann Keely and costumes by myself. Myles White would have been jealous of them and no New York costumer would have made them better than Gladys Krych. The ballet had two performances and three days after the last one we wanted to make a movie. By this time 8 of the 10 boys in the cast had a job and had departed. It lives only in my memory - possibly a few others - for to my surprise, Elisabeth Wineberg quoted a line from the ballet recently - "It can't be bad because it feels so good."

This article was concerned mostly with sources and some happenings that I have been most grateful for. Naturally there is a great deal left out which was also of interest - The Federal Theatre performances - State Fair shows - Children's Civic Theatre - A period as a movie house choreographer - the great Jewish pageant, "The Romance of the People" - performances with the Saidenberg Symphonietta - The World's Fair of 1933-34 a time in the Medical Corps and work in a Defense plant training mechanics. Each a story in themselves.

The past 40 years was not all easy

but I enjoyed every minute of it and am glad that I never turned back to what might have been an easier life. When in trouble I always believed in that old saying - 'When you're in trouble and your knees knock - kneel in them.'

Another way of saying it or looking at it is - 'You never get to lead the band if you can't face the music.'

On August 6th Mr. Stone and I leave for Europe. It will be his third trip

and my first. Our trip will include Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Spain and Portugal.

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